

# News Release



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## **U.S. Department of Labor's MSHA: Miners safer today than one year ago** *Strengthened seals, additional breathable air, higher civil penalties help improve safety*

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – One year ago today, the U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) issued a Program Information Bulletin banning the construction of any new alternative seals. Today, underground seals are required to be much stronger than they were one year ago, and MSHA has made significant progress implementing the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response (MINER) Act, signed into law last June.

"MSHA has put in place many meaningful protections for miners in the past year, and we continue working diligently to fully implement the MINER Act," said Richard E. Stickler, assistant secretary of labor for Mine Safety and Health Administration. "The MINER Act gave MSHA additional tools to help improve mine safety nationwide, and we are working hard to get these protections in place for America's miners. We are meeting our MINER Act deadlines."

The MINER Act was signed into law on June 15, 2006. Since then, MSHA has aggressively implemented the MINER Act by:

- Establishing new maximum penalties for flagrant violations. MSHA has already issued 13 citations for flagrant violations, two of which were assessed at the maximum penalty level of \$220,000;
- Issuing an ETS to increase the strength of seals in underground coal mines to 120 pounds per square inch (psi), and requiring environments behind 50 psi seals to be monitored and maintained inert, seven months before the deadline imposed by Congress;
- Requiring more self-contained self-rescuers (SCSRs) in every underground coal mine;
- Requiring fire-resistant lifelines in all underground coal mines;
- Mandating additional safety training and training on the use of SCSRs at underground coal mines;
- Requiring redundant underground to surface communications systems in underground coal mines; and
- Requiring all underground coal mines to submit emergency response plans that include, among other things, post-accident breathable air for trapped miners.

In addition to meeting its deadlines to implement the MINER Act, MSHA also:

- Issued an ETS on mine evacuations three months before the MINER Act was enacted;
- Proposed the three largest civil penalties against underground coal operators in the history of the agency;
- Launched special emphasis programs to examine retreat mining practices and coal dust control methods;
- Issued new civil penalty regulations that will result in nearly tripling prior total fines; and
- Issued comprehensive accident reports on the Sago, Aracoma and Darby accidents that provide teaching models for lessons learned.

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